

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005698

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2013

TAGS: PGOV PHUM SOCI JO

SUBJECT: BAGHDAD BASED IRAQIS SHARE THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES ON LIFE IN IRAQ

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) PolOff discussed with two Baghdad based Iraqis what their lives in Iraq are like post-Saddam, Iraqi expectations vs. current realities, the lack of security and basic services, and observations on how the U.S. can ensure stability, democracy and prosperity in Iraq. Among their chief concerns is the continued instability and the political power given to the Shi'a community. End Summary.

IRAQIS HOPES DWINDLING

¶12. (C) PolOff met September 3 with Vahe Minas, an Iraqi Christian, businessman and wealthy landowner living in Baghdad, to discuss his views on the current situation in Iraq. Minas holds Jordanian residency and travels frequently between Baghdad and Amman, where his extended family resides. Minas described the situation in Baghdad as "chaotic". He owns a cosmetics company, with 20 employees, and continues to operate his factory with the aid of generators. He said Baghdadis, while hopeful and optimistic after the war, now feel that the U.S. presence has done nothing for them, citing how Iraqis, now more than ever, rely on the Saddam-era "ration" system for their daily subsistence. High among his many concerns is the deteriorating security situation. He described how he hid his 6 late model cars before the war in a friend's walled garden for safekeeping and how they remain there due to the high incidence of carjackings. In Baghdad, he drives a beat up car to try to stay unnoticed by roaming carjackers. He has friends who have been stopped, ordered out of their cars, and seen their cars driven off by gangs who seem to operate with total impunity.

¶13. (C) Minas detailed how U.S. forces are losing much of the goodwill they initially enjoyed after the war. He related how he found his house looted after the war with only a few pieces of furniture left. Adding insult to injury, he returned days later to find that U.S. forces had broken his front door, burst in looking for documents, and damaged the few remaining pieces of furniture. He wondered why U.S. forces had not contacted him and asked for keys to the house. He said the U.S. forces later claimed they were searching for important documents but all they found were Minas family deeds to properties owned in Iraq. He claimed U.S. forces often rely on misinformation supplied by ill intentioned informants. Minas is very concerned about kidnappings for ransom and the lack of security along the Baghdad-Amman corridor. He cannot understand why U.S. forces are not able to patrol such a vital road and provide travelers a greater level of security. He said bandits are known to operate in the Ramadi-Falluja sector.

Political Landscape

¶14. (C) Minas said that the Governing Council (GC) lacks confidence and credibility. Iraqis view them as unknowns and consider GC member Adnan Pachachi as a follower rather than a leader. On INC leader Ahmed Chalabi, Minas acknowledged that, although he comes from a prominent and respected Iraqi family, he is tarnished by allegations of corruption and seen as an outsider rather than someone who endured the many hardships suffered by Iraqis under Saddam's rule. He added that many Iraqis have a soft spot for Hashemite pretender Sharif Ali, seen by some Iraqis as next-in-line to the Iraqi royal family.

Bring back the Ba'athi Armed Forces and more...

¶15. On September 2 PolOff met with Dr. Nihad Jassam, a Sunni, Baghdad based businessman and member of an informal "think tank" composed of Iraqis from different religions, political backgrounds and walks of life. Jassam said the biggest mistake the U.S. made was abolishing the Iraqi regular armed forces. The regular army was not closely aligned with Saddam's regime and was widely supported by the people.

Evidence of this, he highlighted, was that the regular army did not fight against U.S. forces. He stressed that the U.S. must bring back the Ba'athi armed forces, "wearing the same old uniforms and using the same tanks" to show people a 100% Iraqi face they recognize. This step would allow U.S. forces to get out of major cities and make the "occupation" less visible. He added that the U.S. armed forces hold no credibility with average Iraqis.

16. (C) Jassam described the Governing Council as an ineffective body that "has no arms and legs". Jassam also recommended, after bringing back the regular armed forces, naming Ministers of Defense (letting the army itself make the choice) and Foreign Affairs would contribute to the stabilization of the country to be followed by the establishment of parliament. Why, asked Jassam rhetorically, must Iraqis waste time drafting a new constitution when the 1921 Constitution can be updated and modernized. He warned against federalism, which he believed could promote sectarianism, and suggested following King Faisal's autonomous governorates approach.

17. (C) Jassam added that bringing back the Iraqi monarchy would act as a unifying symbol for all Iraqis. Iraqis would have to determine, he stressed, the type of monarchy, the powers of the King and whether the armed forces would be under the control of the King or a separate Prime Minister. He opined that the armed forces must be composed of mixed Sunni, Shi'a, Christian, Kurdish and Turkmen regiments and stressed that the U.S. would be instrumental in making it a professional army.

Shi'a Empowerment: Double Edged Sword

18. (C) Jassam warned against allowing the Shi'a to gain the "political" upperhand in Iraq. Jassam, a Sunni married to a Shi'a, said that the Sunni were the "glue" that held Iraq together. He stressed the region is mainly Sunni, Christians view the Sunni as moderates and have established strong bonds, and the Shi'a accept them as fellow Arabs. He believes the Shi'a are playing a game of "wait and see" and warned that once they've obtained what they want no one will be able to control them. He would not go into further details but promised to continue the dialogue with PolOff when he next visits Amman.

COMMENT

19. (C) Both Minas and Jassam consider themselves part of an elite group of Iraqis who want to rebuild Iraq. They both want to see the U.S. succeed in Iraq and set the country on a prosperous and democratic road. While still optimistic, they are deeply concerned with the slow progress and continuing political and social instability. Minas and Jassam both believe that the U.S. opened up a political "Pandora's box" in Iraq, and that it will prove difficult to determine what shape the Iraqi political landscape will follow.

HALE